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Statement submitted by Latin American Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Twenty years on from Beijing: progress made and commitments outstanding with regard to observation of the human rights of women in Latin America and the Caribbean

Two decades since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, gender and the rights of women have undoubtedly acquired prominence and visibility in various national, regional and international arenas and institutions, including the United Nations system itself.

With regard to the network's area of work, in 15 countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region, we wish to highlight that although legal advances and public policies that recognize the equal rights of women and men have been achieved, with broad support from feminist organizations, much remains to be done to ensure the effectiveness of their implementation and the fulfilment of established objectives.

There has been increased recognition of how equality can be promoted through institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming, which, with varying levels of independence depending on the country and, in the majority of cases, with small budgets, successfully cut across other government bodies.

Despite the passage of time, the feminization of poverty remains one of the main obstacles to women's development in contexts characterized by neoliberal globalization models that prioritize the over-exploitation of the environment and its resources, the accumulation of wealth and the protection of markets over human dignity, which has an impact particularly on the lives of women.

With regard to sexual and reproductive health as a fundamental human right, the enjoyment of that right is hindered by legal restrictions, such as those that limit the right to safe and cost-free abortions, or by sexual violence or danger to the life or health of women. Special attention should be paid to laws that criminalize the reproductive autonomy of women, such as those in Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

With regard to violence against women, 20 years on from the adoption of the Convention of Belém do Pará, which 34 countries have ratified, only nine countries have established violence against women as a specific offence under their domestic legislation, within the framework of provisions on domestic violence. We draw attention to the retrograde step in Nicaraguan legislation in the form of the amendment of Act No. 779 to include mediation in cases of violence, which represents a failure to acknowledge unequal power relationships, puts women at greater risk and results in more impunity.

In addition, the criminalization of feminicide or femicide, while an important way to highlight the phenomenon of extreme violence against women, cannot be an isolated tool, as policies to prevent and eliminate such forms of extreme violence against women should take priority. It is also necessary to implement statistical and reporting systems that use methods compliant with methodological criteria that help to show the phenomenon in all true light.

We draw attention to the attacks and growing criminalization to which female human rights defenders are being subjected. In 2012, 414 attacks against such defenders were recorded in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico, 118 of which were perpetrated in Mexico alone. Intimidation, physical assault and femicide have all been among the forms of abuse inflicted.

Girls' progressive enjoyment of their rights as human beings remains to be attained, and multiple violations of those rights continue. Gender-based violence against girls begins at a young age in home and school environments, which, according to studies, has a bearing on pregnancy among adolescents.

We call for the right to a non-sexist and anti-discriminatory education that fully addresses sexuality. The absence of such an education contributes to the high pregnancy rate among adolescents and perpetuates attitudes based on interpretations of biology or religion that are removed from scientific fact.

The Platform for Action does not end on its twentieth anniversary. The commitments made therein must be expanded insofar as they cut across other agendas of the United Nations system, such as the Cairo and post-2015 development agendas.

We believe that the goal of the Platform has not yet been achieved. We, the women of Latin America and the world, continue to call for gender equality, development and peace.